



AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION

INSURANCE HEARING
1/25/2010

January 26, 2011

Joint Committee on Insurance and Real Estate
Legislative Office Building
Room 2800
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: S.B. 17—An Act Concerning Wellness Programs and Expansion
of Health Insurance Coverage

Chairmen Crisco, Megna, and Members of the Committee:

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 140,000 members and affiliates (over 2,000 of whom reside in Connecticut), who are audiologists, speech-language pathologists, and speech, language, and hearing scientists. We offer the following comments to highlight the importance of requiring insurance coverage for hearing aids for children under 18.

Current Connecticut law only requires insurance coverage for hearing aids for children through age 12. As illustrated the recent Journal of the American Medical Association article, "Change in Prevalence of Hearing Loss in U.S. Adolescents" (*JAMA*, Aug. 18, 2010), teen hearing loss has jumped 31% from 1988–1994 to 2005–2006, and for mild and worse cases, spiked 77% over the same period. The study showed one in five U.S. adolescents 12 to 19 years old—approximately 6.5 million teens—had hearing loss in 2005–2006. Teen hearing loss is increasing at an epidemic rate.

For the young, even a mild or moderate case of hearing loss could bring difficulty learning, developing speech, and building the important interpersonal skills necessary to foster self-esteem and success in school and life.

Academic achievement and social functioning are significantly impacted for children with hearing loss. In addition, the costs to the state over the course of the child's education can be prohibitive.

Academic Achievement

- Children with hearing loss have difficulty with all areas of academic achievement, especially reading and mathematical concepts.
- Children with mild to moderate hearing losses, on average, achieve one to four grade levels lower than their peers with normal hearing, unless appropriate management occurs.
- Children with severe to profound hearing loss usually achieve skills no higher than the third- or fourth-grade level, unless appropriate educational intervention occurs early.

- The gap in academic achievement between children with normal hearing and those with hearing loss usually widens as they progress through school.
- The level of achievement is related to parental involvement and the quantity, quality, and timing of the support services children receive.

Social Functioning

- Children with severe to profound hearing losses often report feeling isolated, without friends, and unhappy in school, particularly when their socialization with other children with hearing loss is limited.
- These social problems appear to be more frequent in children with a mild or moderate hearing losses than in those with a severe to profound loss.

Financial Impact

- Research by the National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management (NCHAM), has shown that ... "by the time a child with a hearing loss graduates for high school, more than \$400,000 per child could be saved in special education costs if the child is identified early and given appropriate educational, medical, and audiological services", including hearing aids. Visit NCHAM's Web site for additional information at www.infanthearing.org/.

We urge you to consider the academic and social impact on children with hearing loss in your consideration of SB 17, which requires insurance coverage of hearing aids for teens with hearing loss.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. Should you have any questions, please contact Susan Adams, ASHA's director of state legislative and regulatory advocacy, at sadams@asha.org; or Janet Deppe, ASHA's director of state advocacy, at jdeppe@asha.org.

Sincerely,



Paul R. Rao, PhD, CCC, CPHQ, FACHE
2011 ASHA President